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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Campfire Food for the Fourth." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

--ooOoo--

I'm dedicating my time today to my picnic-minded friends. And I hope their number is large. For here's the glorious Fourth arriving on Wednesday, and if ever a holiday spelled picnic, that certainly is the one. Of course, some people will be spending the day speeding along the highways, taking chances on accidents; filling up on the wrong kind of food or eating too much; scaring themselves and their children by riding on roller coasters or shooting off dangerous fireworks; staying up too late, getting tired and cross; and generally preparing for a restless night and a sad time the morning after. But not you and I. We'll take the family off to the woods or the beach or wherever our favorite picnic spot is. We'll play games and go swimming and have a delicious meal cooked in the open. And when we come home at night we'll be rested, refreshed and cheerful as crickets.

If you can't take a jaunt out into the country, how about a picnic in the backyard? I know one family who often entertain their friends at what they call "backyard barbecues." They have a nice stretch of grass out behind their house, some trees for shade, and an attractive little cobblestone fireplace built by the young son in the family. Their outdoor meals have become so famous that their friends vie with each other for invitations.

Well, I've collected some picnic ideas for you today from various friends who make a specialty of outdoor cooking.

First, a pointer or two about your fire. As all good campers know, a good fire for cooking is always small enough to handle easily. Use only dry and seasoned wood. Build the fire a half an hour or so before you want it and let it burn down to coals, replenishing it occasionally until a deep bed of glowing embers is ready to do the cooking. Red coals, not flames, do the best cooking. A large and flaming fire burns your hands, smokes your face, and blackens your food.

Some picnic grounds have stone fireplaces with built-in grates. Others don't. If you're going to one of the latter places, better take along your own grate to hold your coffee pot and frying pan. One of the grates from the oven of your gas stove will work very nicely if you lay it on top of a foundation of stones. Or, you can use one of the regular camping grates with four folding wire legs that you can plant firmly in the ground. For broiling over the coals, you'll also find a regular meat-broiler with a long handle useful. You can use this either over or under the grate.



Probably the favorite meat to cook over an open fire is steak. So here's some advice to make your Fourth-of-July steak perfect. Don't have it cut too thick. An inch or an inch and a quarter is just right for cooking over embers. For easy handling, cut the steak in strips that you can turn easily over the fire with a fork, or that will fit in your broiler and also in rolls or sandwiches. First, sear the steak quickly by holding it close to the fire until it browns on one side. Then, turn it over, and brown it on the other side. Put the salt on after cooking, not before. A good camp cook I know fixes his steaks this way. He puts a layer of bacon strips on the broiler, then the steak, then a thin layer of sliced onions over it. He broils this until the steak and onions are done. The bacon often shrivels up and blackens, but the flavor remains. Before serving, he seasons this well with salt and pepper. Another friend likes her steak smeared with mustard sauce before broiling.

Have you ever heard of bacon and eggs, cooked cave-man style? Well, here's a primitive idea. Try it some time when you don't want to carry along a frying pan. Just cook your bacon and eggs on a hot stone. Find a flat, smooth slab of stone and two smaller stones to support it. Build a fire over, and under, and around your flat stone. When you're sure it's hot -- test it as you do your iron -- when it's hot, brush off the top, but leave the embers around and under it. Now put three strips of bacon on top of it in the shape of a triangle. When they are nearly cooked, drop an egg in the center and it will fry in the fat from the bacon. But here's one caution about heating stones. Some stones crack and fly into bits when they're hot. Better keep at a safe distance from the fire until the stone is hot.

Ever try cheese bobs on a picnic? They are quick and easy to cook over a campfire, and delicious in rolls or sandwiches. Wrap a small square of cheese in two strips of bacon. Stick this little package on the sharp end of a pointed stick or on the prongs of a long-handled broiling fork. Broil until the bacon is done. Have your bread handy, for cheese is inclined to drip when it's hot.

We're always hearing how good coffee is when cooked over an open fire. I think cocoa also deserves praise as a campfire beverage, especially for the younger picnickers. Camp cocoa is easy to make, if you use half canned milk and half water, and if you mix your sugar and cocoa together at home. The proportions for each cup of cocoa are: 1 teaspoon of cocoa, 1 teaspoon of sugar, 1/2 cup of milk; 1/2 cup of water. A pinch of salt will help the flavor. When you're ready to make the cocoa, mix a little water with the dry cocoa and sugar until you have a smooth paste. Put the rest of the water on to boil over the fire. When the water is hot, add the canned milk. Bring it just to the boiling point. Then add the sugar and cocoa paste. Beat and serve. Of course, if you use sweetened condensed milk, you won't need sugar.

Camp meals like other meals need to be balanced to be satisfying. Along with the steak or bacon or other meat and the rolls or sandwiches, you need vegetables and fruits. Tomato juice or fruit juice makes as good a beverage for a picnic as at home. You can keep the green leaves of lettuce crisp and cold in a tightly closed pial, anchored with a stone in a spring, or at the edge of a stream. If you can't manage fresh garden products, you'll always find it easy to heat up canned vegetables over a campfire. Canned tomatoes and corn is a good open-fire mixture. Canned lima beans in tomato sauce is another. Of course, the expert camp cook roasts potatoes and ears of corn in the hot ashes.



